

**TESTIMONY OF IAN SMITH IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 5423
AN ACT CONCERNING DISSECTION CHOICE**

**FOR THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
MARCH 8, 2010**

To the Members of the Education Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill No. 5423 titled "An Act Concerning Dissection Choice".

Current mandatory dissection policies harm students in very serious ways. Students who have ethical or religious objections to harming animals frequently object to participating or observing dissection and would generally be more than willing to fulfill their academic obligations through the use of more humane learning methods that are already widely available. When dissection is mandatory for the successful completion of a course these students are forced to decide between compromising their sincerely held values and accepting a failing grade. It is unreasonable to put young people into such a difficult position and to tempt them to view their firmly-held values as something that can or should be discarded.

In many instances the formal sanction imposed on the student by the school will be amplified by the students' peers who may not understand the reasons behind refusing to dissect. When the school fails to respect the values of a particular student it sends a signal that the student's concerns are not valid, that they are unreasonable, and that they are worthy of punishment. This is antithetical to the respectful environment that schools should be actively creating.

Finally, students' who object to dissection and realize that it is a required part of a course may, to avoid conflict, opt not to enroll in such courses. It should be highly alarming that the natural sciences are effectively closed to such students. Education should be aiming to multiply the life prospects of its students yet mandatory dissection policies do just the opposite, they narrow the possibilities of many students.

Simply put, dissection is not necessary for learning anatomy or any aspect of the natural sciences. To force students to participate in dissection under threat of punishment is unwarranted and serves only to alienate students and to create a hostile environment in schools.

H.B. 5423 seeks to rectify these problems and I therefore urge its swift passage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ian Smith".

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